# Memorial Address

UPON

# William J. Sewell

UNITED STATES SENATOR

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# MEMORIAL ADDRESS

UPON

# WILLIAM J. SEWELL,

UNITED STATES SENATOR OF NEW JERSEY

BY

## HON. EDWARD C. STOKES,

DELIVERED BEFORE THE

## LEGISLATURE OF NEW JERSEY,

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When Bossuet rose to deliver the funeral oration over the Prince of Conde, he said that words could add nothing to the fame or virtues of the dead; his actions alone were the highest praise; all other eulogies failed.

The same thought is suggested by the character and work of him to whose memory to-day we pay our tribute of appreciation and love. His life was so sincere, so modest, and yet so eventful and full of results, that a faithful narrative of deeds performed will best speak his virtues.

New Jersey boasts of a long line of distinguished sons. Fame and glory have come to her from her soldiers and statesmen; from her jurists and scholars; from her discoverers and inventors; but of all the illustrious men whom she claims as her own, there is none who loved his country and State with a greater

love, or more zealously sought to promote their welfare and honor, than did General William J. Sewell. I speak of him as "General," for by that title he was loved by his comrades of war; by that title known throughout the State and nation, and by that saluted by his associates and friends.

He was not of American parentage. He was alien born—ours by adoption. Yet he was none the less an American by instinct and training, and had a most sincere and genuine affection for this Land of the Free. His patriotism knew no bounds, and the Stars and Stripes were as dear to his heart as the life he so freely offered in their defense. On one occasion, in response to a greeting by his friends, in a burst of feeling, of which he was always capable, but which he seldom displayed, he declared that if he could have his choice, he would choose to die fighting for the country which had done so much for him.

The typical American is cosmopolitan by blood and kin. In him are to be found some of the traits

of all nations. He is partly English, partly Irish, partly German, boasts of his Dutch ancestry, and shows some of the suavity of the French. He is the evolved product of hundreds and thousands of liberty-loving pioneers who have come hither from abroad, found homes upon our hospitable shores, and, adapting themselves to the genius of our institutions, have become part of the warp and woof of our national life.

These adopted citizens, appreciating the blessings, privileges and opportunities of America, have been ever eager in protecting her ideals and ready to do battle whenever her honor and safety were threatened. The War of the Revolution had its DeKalb, its Von Steuben, its Pulaski and its Lafayette. Upon the muster rolls of the Union forces are found the names of thousands who, cradled in foreign lands, fought along the Potomac, the Tennessee and the Mississippi for the preservation of the Republic. Heintzelmann, Siegel, Weber, Hexamer of this State, Woerner and his German Battery, Blenker's

Brigade of New York, and two hundred thousand others, attest the devotion of the sons of the Fatherland to the nation's cause. Thomas Francis Meagher and his gallant Irish Brigade, fighting Phil Kearny, New Jersey's idol of the war; Sheridan and Kilpatrick, with one hundred and fifty thousand more of like nationality, attest the devotion of the Irish heart. Nor were these the only contributing nations; others, too, gave of their sons to our defense and safe deliverance. To such as these—Americans not by birth, but by choice—who have proved their title and their patriotism by service and sacrifice, belongs the man whose life we now review and whose death we lament.

He came of a vigorous and self-reliant ancestry. Its original coat-of-arms was first conferred upon one of the line for gallantry at the Battle of Cressy, in defense of the Black Prince, and to this there was added later the crest, a mailed hand brandishing a cap of liberty—a republican emblem that could only have been won by resistance to kings. From men

like these, independent freeholders of the border counties of old England, who knew no over-lords, who had fought for principles of law and justice at Naseby and Marston Moor, and who breathed the very air of sovereignty in the freedom of their homes, sprang one of the ancestral lines of the subject of this occasion. Thomas Sewell was the second son of the family, living in the parish of Sebergham, Cumberland. Commissioned in the English civil service, he was sent in the performance of public duties to Castlebar, County Mayo, Ireland. While there he married into a family of Scotch-Irish lineage—the daughter of Captain William Butler Joyce, of the Fifth Irish Dragoons, a crippled veteran of the Peninsular War.

General Sewell was one of three children of this union, and was thus of Irish-English descent—English upon his father's side and Scotch-Irish upon his mother's; but it was Ireland, the land of his birth and boyhood days, rather than England, that he always held in the greatest affection. In

him were blended the best traits of these races—the sturdiness, determination and dignity of the English, the shrewdness and keen perception of the Celtic; in his blood were the same strains that gave Wellington to England, Bruce to Scotland and O'Connell to Ireland.

Born in 1835, left fatherless and motherless at an early age, this orphan lad followed an older brother, Robert, to the City of New York. There, when about eighteen years of age, he entered the service of the sea, and sailed before the mast on the "Flyaway," an American merchantman about to make a voyage of the world. Steam had not then revolutionized the commerce of the seas, and ships of the clipper type occupied the front rank in ocean travel. One incident of this voyage makes it worthy of mention. The child is always father to the man, and to the boy on the good ship "Flyaway" there came an opportunity to show those sterling qualities which distinguished him in after life and made him successful in every field in which his energies were

employed. The ship touched at a port in Australia at a time when the discovery of gold was offering hopes of speedy and fabulous wealth. The crew yielded to the temptation, mutinied and attempted to seize the vessel, but young Sewell, with the same hatred of rebellion he showed later in life on a broader field, took his stand with the little band of officers who were defending the property entrusted to their care. All night long the opposing forces held their ground, without advantage on either side. With the dawn of the morning, at great personal risk, Sewell succeeded in signaling a man-of-war lying a few miles distant. A relief party was at once sent, and the officers of the "Flyaway" were soon relieved and restored to their rightful authority. For this courageous conduct, he received promotion and the youngster who sailed, as a boy, returned with the rank of first mate.

His arrival in this country was coincident with the acute stages of the slavery agitation. It was the time of the culmination of questions, discussions and

controversies which involved the life of the nation, and which were to be settled only by the tribunal of war. The passage of the Fugitive Slave law, the repeal of the Missouri Compromise, the Kansas and Nebraska struggle, the Lincoln and Douglass debates, and John Brown's raid, followed each other in rapid succession. Lovejoy, William Lloyd Garrison and Wendell Phillips were the storm centers of agitation. The crisis was at hand; the time had come when the nation could no longer exist half slave and half free; it must make the choice. The signal fires of war flashed at Fort Sumter. A flame of patriotism stirred the hearts of the North. The nation must be saved. Volunteers alone could save it, and they went bravely and promptly to the front in response to Lincoln's call.

Of these volunteers, among the first to enlist was Captain Sewell. He offered himself as a private, but secured a Captain's commission in the Fifth New Jersey, and served throughout that four years' terrible conflict, save for a brief period when disabled

by sickness and wounds. His record in the war is a part of our State's history, of which every Jerseyman is proud. For gallant and meritorious conduct he was steadily advanced in rank, and near the close of the war was commissioned by brevet, Brigadier-General and Major-General of Volunteers. A medal, presented to him by the officers and men of the Fifth New Jersey, "for valor," inscribed with the names of the engagements in which he participated, is a mute but eloquent testimonial of the regard in which he was held by those who served with him on the field of danger. His character as a soldier, however, is so well described in the order, issued at the time of his death, by the then Governor of this State, that I can do no better than to quote its words: "He was a type whom all love to honor and follow. Courageous, strict in discipline, devoted to the interest of his men, ever mindful of their comfort and well-being, he had the love and loyal devotion of those who served under him. He was bold, and

inspired others with a confidence and courage akin to his own. He led where any dared to follow."

His charge at Chancellorsville was one of the most brilliant feats of the war and won for him a medal of honor. The war correspondent who was upon the field at the time, described it as "one of those splendid achievements seldom occurring in this war, but which, when occurring, cover the soldier's career with imperishable glory." It was the morning of May 3d, 1863—the last of the three days' battle. The Second Brigade of New Jersey had had but two hours' sleep during the night. They had formed in fighting line before daybreak, and had been under continuous fire for over four hours. Many of their comrades were dead. More lay wounded and dying about them. General Mott had been injured and carried from the field. General Berry had been killed, and the command fell upon Colonel Sewell.

To the south and in front, and to the west and on the right flank, were the Confederate troops. They

were swarming forward in overwhelming numbers, and had seized a hill from which the Federals had been driven, and which Sewell realized must be recovered. With the instinct of a born soldier he rallied his disheartened forces, and seeing them hesitate in the presence of the foe of such overwhelming numbers that it seemed madness to charge, he galloped to the front, in advance of the brigade, until he stood in distinct view of all, and then exclaimed: "At least Jerseymen, follow me!" His example was irresistible. With a rush and cheer the whole line went forward. Up and over the hill they drove the retreating enemy, and on the crest of the earth-works planted the regimental colors. The new Commander and New Jersey's sons had added another to the illustrious deeds of valor that crowd the history of Hooker's old division.

Colonel Sewell's soldierly conduct and his eminent capacity for command were complimented that day upon the field.

It was one of the glories of the civil conflict that

it never cultivated a purely martial spirit. After its four years of carnage and strife, of military life, of bivouac and battle, of fevered excitement, when peace was declared, when the muster hour sounded, its millions of armed men melted quietly away into the ranks of private life as if war had never been.

General Sewell was one of the men who stepped down from a high position of rank as a soldier, to start at the bottom and begin life anew as a civilian.

His whole career was typically American. It had its early struggles and difficulties and its later victories and triumphs. He was self-made; he owed nothing to fortune; he started with no capital except natural ability, an honest character and a determination to succeed. He won successive stations of honor by the power of his own integrity and industry, his own high purposes and indomitable will.

"He made by force his merit known,
And lived to clutch the golden keys,
To mold a mighty State's decrees."

But he was not only self-made—he was self-educated. In the lives of most great men one can trace the influence of some patron or teacher, or some institution that has guided and directed their thoughts in days of youth. Alexander had Aristotle as his instructor; Grant had the advantage of a training at West Point; Garfield sat at the feet of Mark Hopkins. General Sewell taught himself. In the school of experience alone, he learned the lessons of life. Upon the various occupations in which he engaged in life he entered without previous training, and schooled himself to a high degree of excellence.

His labors in the field of transportation began at the close of the war and continued to the end of his life. It is a story of accomplishment and advancement—the story of one who began in a subordinate position and climbed his way to the top. Station Master, Superintendent, Vice President, President! Round by round he rose, by careful attention to duty, by steadfastness of purpose, by industry, by perception of opportunity and by courage of per-

formance. "No words," says a high official of that great railroad system with which he was connected, "can overstate the confidence reposed in him by his associates, or their appreciation of his exceptional abilities." He had the habit of *doing* things; his mind was constructive and creative rather than critical; his insight was quick and true; he saw improvements and new avenues of trade and traffic, just as Columbus saw the new world before he crossed the Atlantic. These were as real to him as revelations to Mahomet. He thought them out carefully, planned his work as he would a campaign, and when once he had decided upon a course of action, nothing swerved him from the determined pathway.

It has been well said that the world and its affairs are administered by men of action rather than by philosophers and dreamers. The marvelous achievements of this day and generation are the result of efforts of the great captains of industry—of men whose practical minds can see a completed work even before it is started—a trans-continental rail-

road before the first spike is driven; an Erie canal before a spade is handled; a sub-marine cable joining two continents before the Great Eastern is built; a Brooklyn bridge before the first cable is swung. It is in these fields that the greatest progress has been made, the greatest benefits conferred upon mankind. As McKinley pointed out in that memorable speech at Buffalo, trade and transportation have revolutionized civilization, improved the condition of society and made the whole world one. New methods of traffic and communication have enabled us to utilize the fields, the forests, the mines, furnish profitable employment to millions, bring comfort to the home and competence to age. Such enterprises as these always engaged the attention of General Sewell. He held with Schiller that—

"The toil of science swells the wealth of art."

In his mind the railroads were the necessary veins and arteries of all scientific, industrial and business life. They have done more than any one agency to

people the land, extend civilization and open the wilderness, and to their development he devoted his whole life with all his great energy and ability.

"Genius," said Carlyle, "is the capacity for hard work," and those who imagine to the contrary find no encouragement in General Sewell's life. His disposition of business was orderly and rapid; he kept every appointment; his executive ability, skill in classification and quickness of perception, enabled him to dispatch a vast amount of details with ease; but he seldom enjoyed, or rather, I should say, suffered, an idle moment. He was always at work. Even when traveling, he was dictating correspondence or attending to some of his many duties, and few men had more. In addition to his railroad and senatorial work, more than enough for one man when performed as conscientiously as he performed it, he looked after the National Soldiers' Home, an institution always dear to his heart; was a trustee in a great life insurance company, an active director in an international steamship line, several banking

institutions and other kindred enterprises, and he devoted no little time and labor to the National Guard. His intense and earnest nature permitted him to slight no position of trust he assumed. His unremitting industry undoubtedly hastened his end. His physicians warned him that the strain was too great; but in vain. He could not stop. He worked with the same sense of duty that drove the early martyrs to the stake. In a burst of confidence he once said to me: "I want to die in harness," and this remark indicated the intense energy of the man.

To the younger generation he was best known in a public capacity. Three times a member of our State Senate; three times President of that body; three times elected United States Senator; six times in succession Chairman of the State Delegation to National Conventions, is a record surpassed by few. For a quarter of a century he was the acknowledged leader of his own party, and toward the last—I speak advisedly—he was trustfully consulted by his opponents as well. There were times when his

leadership was challenged, but never successfully. The value of his services and his unfailing courage made him invincible. Like the drummer boy at Marengo, he did not know how to retreat; he only knew how to advance.

A bold and manly frankness characterized his expressions of opinion, and in all his undertakings it may be truly said, "he never stooped to conquer." He never paltered in a double sense. How he hated shams! How he scorned the hypocrite! How powerless was friend or foe to whip him into any line of action contrary to his ideas of right! His State and country were never in doubt as to his opinion upon all public questions; his position was as clear as the sun in a cloudless sky. He was a man of strong convictions; he saw clearly, he believed firmly, he fought consistently, as the brave fight. His sense of honesty would not permit him even to mislead. He would *speak the truth* even when silence would have answered. His promise was performance; once given, never recalled;

his emphatic "no," seldom reconsidered. Few men ever had a more devoted or loyal following, and few men had greater faculty of turning opponents into friends. Nor did he win friendship or popularity by a false affability or by assumed graciousness. It was his rugged honesty and sterling qualities that made men trust and love him. On the other hand, he was uncompromisingly loyal to his own friends, and would sacrifice himself rather than forsake them. He said with the poet,

"The friends thou hast and their adoption tried,
Grapple them to thy soul with hooks of steel."

Such a man possessed all the natural qualities of leadership, and his was a leadership of men by loyalty rather than power. Never was his strength in this respect more clearly shown than in the hour when sickness had compelled him to yield the active control of affairs. He had returned from Europe with little hope of recovery, and when the convention of his party met in September, for the first time

in thirty years he was unable to be present. It was a solemn and impressive gathering, meeting as it did under the very shadow of the death of the President of the United States, and although the members of that body felt that General Sewell would never again carry the banner of leadership, his voice was just as potent as though he had been on the ground in all his old-time vigor. That convention took sincere pride in unanimously passing a resolution declaring that, "as delegates in convention assembled, we send our most cordial and heartfelt greetings to our absent leader, Senator William J. Sewell. We recognize that his devoted and patriotic services to his State and country have been given at the sacrifice of his health and strength, and while we miss his presence and valuable counsel on this occasion, we hope for his speedy recovery to his former health and vigor, and look forward with confidence to the time he will again lead us in person, as he does now in spirit and influence." Such a tribute comes only to the men whom the people love.

It is not necessary to dwell at length upon his legislative career. It began in these halls and ended in the Senate of the United States. Painstaking, faithful, unfailing in attention to duty, combining intimate acquaintance with public requirements, with willingness to render assistance wherever needed, he made himself well nigh indispensable to his constituents. "If you want a thing done, go to General Sewell," was the current advice and practice, until the whole State, regardless of party, leaned on him in confidence and trust.

He was not of an oratorical temperament, but was inclined to act rather than talk. He was

"A true knight,
Speaking in deeds, but deedless in his tongue."

Yet when he did speak, it was always with clearness, force and effect. His presentation of the Monroe Doctrine was a splendid exposition of that international question, and won for him the highest encomiums of the best scholars of the country. His judgment on public questions was patriotic and

statesmanlike. Personal considerations were always subordinate to the welfare of the State, and never for a single instance caused him to swerve from the strict line of duty. His influence among his colleagues was unquestioned. No one stood higher in their estimation, and in achievement of results, he was second to no Senator at Washington. The high regard in which he was held at the capital of the nation was signally illustrated during the Spanish War. The President sent to the Senate for appointment as Major-Generals of Volunteers the names of Sewell and Wilson, Wheeler and Lee. It was a splendid and dramatic company of military heroes. Two of them had worn the gray, and two had worn the blue. They had crossed swords on the field of civil conflict. Now the President of a reunited people commissioned them, with the concurrence of the Senate, to fight side by side under the Stars and Stripes. The nominations were at once confirmed. General Sewell was anxious to don again the uniform and buckle on the sword. His

old longing for the soldier's life returned, for he was essentially a military man, and to one of his close personal friends he said: "I want to have a hand in this war, as I had in the last." But the interests of the country demanded that he should not abandon his place in the Senate, and urgent appeals came to him, not only from his own State, but from all parts of the country, to remain at the legislative post of duty. Then came a remarkable tribute. His party colleagues in the Senate, without a single exception, signed and sent to him a letter urging him to decline the appointment. "We do this," so reads the letter, "knowing that the appointment is well merited by your distinguished military career and your genius for organization and command, but we feel in this exigency, neither the party nor the country can forego in the Senate the influence of your experience, ability, patriotism and integrity in legislative service.

"The military fame which, in your younger days, you won in battle for the preservation of the Union,

cannot well be augmented, and with one accord, we, your party associates and friends, venture to express the hope that your sense of public duty will lead you to continue without interruption in the service of the Senate, which we all feel is of direct utility to the country."

It is interesting to note that in this flattering request there joined another distinguished Jerseyman and life-long friend, Garret A. Hobart. To such an appeal there could be no refusal, and though his commission had been filled out and handed to him, the General put aside his cherished ambition and declined the appointment. The President of the United States did him the honor never to appoint a successor.

I should fail to do justice to the real man if I neglected to speak of his personal traits. His austere and dignified manner was sometimes mistaken for coldness, but behind this air of quiet dignity he had a genial, loving nature and a warm heart that beat for all mankind. He disdained show and display.

His modesty made him retiring, and while he was as courageous as a lion on the field of action, in business or in legislative hall, socially he was timid and shrinking, and avoided rather than sought attention. No one, however, was ever fonder of his friends and associates, or more thoroughly appreciated and enjoyed their society. He was kindness itself, and delighted in acts of benevolenee. He was a generous giver, and never refused to listen to the appeal of the needy and deserving. Indeed, in times of distress he took occasion to look after the condition of the poor and see if they were in need of relief. But while

"He had a tear for pity, and a hand
Open as day for melting charity,"

he shrank from publicity in his giving, and said to those upon whom he had conferred a favor: "See thou tell no man."

Religious institutions always found in him a substantial friend. He was most liberal in his assistance to churches and church work, and always opposed any movement that would tend to abridge

their privileges or their usefulness. He believed they were the chief factors in conserving the interests of good order and the well-being of society. So profound was his respect for all religious influences that he would not even tolerate the criticisms of their opponents, and on one occasion he refused to meet, either publicly or privately, a noted infidel who had come to the State, on the ground that the constitution of New Jersey was founded on the Bible, and he could not afford to countenance anyone who came to attack that foundation.

It was in his home life, however, that his real nature was most clearly revealed, and the attributes which made his character beautiful and attractive were there most clearly seen. His family was the object of his tenderest care. Like McKinley, his home life was a model, and displayed a chivalry of love and devotion that even the engrossing cares of a public career were never allowed to disturb. When presented with the medal of honor for bravery at Chancellorsville, he looked at it in silence for a

time, and then said, in a voice broken with emotion: "This will please my wife and my children." His reverence for his mother, who died in his early youth, was touching and tender. Her memory was always strong in his affections and so long as he lived, he assisted in keeping in repair the little church in which she had worshiped, fitting it with memorial windows and providing free pews—a token of his filial devotion.

It is seldom, indeed, that one makes a success worthy of public attention in even a single avocation; still rarer is it to achieve greatness in every field of effort into which one enters. Soldier, patriot, business man, statesman! In all of these, history writes General Sewell high on the roll of honor. Pass his career in hasty review. He begins at the bottom. He rises to the top. He ships upon a merchantman as a boy, he returns as first mate. He offers himself as private in the War of the Rebellion and becomes a Major-General; he enters the railroad service as agent and becomes its President.

He begins his political career in the State Legislature and becomes United States Senator, the highest office to which he was eligible. This is his record, written in his own deeds.

With a strong and vigorous constitution, supplemented by a fine physique, which to look upon "gave the world assurance of a man," he promised to outlive the allotted three-score-and-ten. During the last three years, however, the strain to which he was subject from private and public duties began to tell, and he gave evidence of failing health, which his friends endeavored to believe was nothing more than the weariness of overwork. In the spring of 1901, however, his condition became so serious and the change in his appearance so noticeable, that even the most hopeful realized that the fight with death was near at hand. Bravely, heroicly, uncomplainingly, he faced the Great Conqueror. A trip to Europe, always before a means of relief, served only to disclose his waning strength, and his return in a condition too weak to see his intimate friends was a

premonition of the worst. Cape May, his home by the sea, was tried in vain. Then he turned to the Southland, in the pathetic hope that its dry mountain air would check the ravages of disease. Here again he was doomed to disappointment. Surrounded by his family, attended by the ministrations of his heroic and devoted wife, he had every care that love and science could devise. Gradually his splendid vitality succumbed. To those who saw him in these last days, he reminded one of the dying of a great oak, which, without strength to resist the blasts and storms, faces them helpless, but undismayed. From the window of his sick chamber he looked out upon an ever-changing scene of valley, mountain and sky; touched now by the grey of dawn, now bathed in the splendor of noonday, now crimson in the evening glow, and as he saw the sun set beyond those lofty hills, to shine apparently in another world, he knew that eventide was near for him. Behind him in retrospect was a life of struggle and success, of labor well done, of duty well performed,

of acts of kindness and charity, and a character pure, stainless, untarnished. The rapid progress of his disease hastened his return to the State, and he came back to his home—where for thirty-five years he had lived in the esteem and love of his fellow-citizens—to await the end. December 27th, 1901, he passed peacefully and painlessly away.

"Like a shadow thrown
Swiftly and sweetly from a passing cloud,
Death fell upon him."

He died in the height of his influence, in the fullness of his power, in the harvest of success. I do not forget his great achievements, the high honors he won, the applause he gained; but if I should write his epitaph, remembering his earnest and sincere character, I should say of him, in the lines of the poet—

"Not stirring words, nor gallant deeds alone;
Plain, patient work fulfilled that length of life;
Duty, not glory—service, not a throne,
Inspired his effort."

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